



Physical Activity and Weight Control



Weight-control Information Network

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Regular physical activity can help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Being physically active can also make you more energetic, improve your mood, and reduce the risk of developing some chronic diseases.

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Physical activity helps you control your weight by using excess calories that would otherwise be stored as fat. Most foods you eat contain calories, and everything you do uses calories, including sleeping, breathing, and digesting food. Balancing the calories you eat with the calories you use through physical activity will help you reach and maintain a healthy weight.



Calories in Food > Calories Used = Weight Gain

Calories in Food < Calories Used = Weight Loss

Calories in Food = Calories Used = Weight Control

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Becoming Physically Active

Experts recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, particularly after you have lost a large amount of weight, you may need to do 60 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity each day.

Physical activity may include structured activities such as walking, running, basketball, or other sports. It may also include daily activities such as household chores, yard work, or walking the dog. Pick a combination of structured and daily activities that fit your schedule.

If you have been inactive for a while, start slowly and work up to 30 minutes a day at a pace that is comfortable for you. If you are unable to be active for 30 minutes at one time, accumulate activity over the course of the day in 10- to 15-minute sessions.

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Health Benefits of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity helps control your weight and may help:

- Reduce your risk of or manage chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol, heart disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, and some cancers;
- Build strong muscles, bones, and joints;
- Improve flexibility and balance;
- Ward off depression; and
- Improve mood and sense of well-being.

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Aerobic Activity

You can meet your goal of at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity by participating in aerobic activities. Aerobic exercise includes any activity that makes you breathe harder than when you are resting and increases your heart rate. Experts recommend moderate-intensity exercise. At this pace, you may breathe harder and find it more difficult to talk, but you should still be able to carry on a conversation. If you are just beginning, slowly work up to moving at a moderate-intensity pace.

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Get Started!

To add more physical activity to your daily life try:

- Taking a brisk walk around the block with family, friends, or coworkers.
- Raking the leaves.
- Walking up the stairs instead of taking the elevator when it is safe to do so.

- Mowing the lawn.
- Taking an activity break at work or home. Get up and stretch or walk around.
- Parking your car further away from entrances of stores, movie theatres, or your home and walk the extra distance when it is safe to do so.

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Strength Training

Strength training is another way for you to meet the recommended minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day. Strength training will also help you burn extra calories and build strong muscles, bones, and joints. Experts recommend strength training 2 to 3 days each week, with 1 full day of rest between workouts to allow your muscles to recover. If you are new to strength training, or physical activity in general, consider hiring a certified personal trainer who can plan an individualized program to help you work out safely and effectively. A personal trainer who has a degree in exercise physiology or is certified through a national certification program such as the American College of Sports Medicine or National Strength and Conditioning Association may be able to help you reach your physical activity goals.

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Get Strong!

Build strong muscles and bones with strengthening exercise. Try:

- Lifting weights
- Using resistance bands
- Using stability or medicine balls
- Doing push-ups and abdominal crunches

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Mind and Body Exercise

In addition to aerobic activity and strength training, you may wish to include other forms of exercise in your physical activity program. Alternatives to traditional exercise provide variety and fun. They may also help reduce stress, increase muscular strength and flexibility, and increase energy levels. Examples of these exercises include yoga, Pilates, and tai chi.

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Keep Moving!

Move at your own pace while you enjoy some of these activities:

- Brisk walking
- Jogging
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Aerobic exercise classes (step aerobics, kick boxing, high/low)
- Dancing (square dancing, salsa, African dance, swing)
- Playing sports (basketball, soccer)

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Tips to a Safe and Successful Physical Activity Program

- Check with your health care provider. If you have a chronic health problem such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure, ask your health care provider about what type and amount of physical activity is right for you.
- Start slowly. Incorporate more physical activity into your daily routine and gradually work up to the 30-minute goal to improve health and manage your weight.
- Set goals. Set short-term and long-term goals and celebrate every success.
- Track progress. Keep an activity log to track your progress. Note when you worked out, what activity you did, how long you did the activity, and how you felt during your workout.
- Think variety. Choose a variety of physical activities to help you meet your goals, prevent boredom, and keep your mind and body challenged.
- Be comfortable. Wear comfortable shoes and clothes, and ones that are appropriate to the activity you will be doing.
- Listen to your body. Stop exercising and consult your health care provider if you experience chest discomfort or pain, dizziness, severe headache, or other unusual symptoms while you work out. If pain does not go away, get medical help right away. If you are feeling fatigued or sick, take time off from your routine to rest. You can ease back into your program when you start feeling better.
- Eat nutritious foods. Choose a variety of nutritious foods every day. Remember that your health and weight depend on both your eating plan and physical activity level.
- Get support. Encourage your family and friends to support you and join you in your activity. Form walking groups with coworkers, play with your children outside, or take a dance class with friends.

Regular physical activity will help you feel, move, and look better. Whether your goal is to achieve and maintain a healthy weight or improve your health, becoming physically active is a step in the right direction. Take advantage of the health benefits of physical activity and make it a part of your life.

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**Additional
Reading from
the Weight-
control
Information
Network (WIN)**

- *Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan: Better Health and You.* NIH Publication No. 02-4992 (available in English and Spanish)
- *Active at Any Size.* NIH Publication No. 00-4352
- *Walking...A Step in the Right Direction.* NIH Publication No. 01-4155

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**Additional
Resources**

American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)

P.O. Box 1440
Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440
Phone: (317) 637-9200

www.acsm.org

National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA)

1955 N. Union Blvd.
Colorado Springs, CO 80909
Phone: (719) 632-6722
Toll Free: 1-800-815-6826

www.nsca-lift.org

President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

Department W
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 738-H
Washington, DC 20201-0004
Phone: (202) 690-9000

www.fitness.gov

Shape Up America!

www.shapeup.org

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Weight-control Information Network

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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

WIN answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about weight control and related issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This fact sheet was also reviewed by Steven Blair, P.E.D., President and CEO, Cooper Institute, Dallas, TX.

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<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/physact.htm>

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